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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted, as part of a larger survey replicating a 1971 national survey of 1,328 journalists, to learn more about the behind-the-scenes editorial personnel in radio and television. A 3-stage sampling plan was used to draw a national sampling of 1,251 journalists, from which telephone interviews were completed with 1,001 for an overall response rate of 80%. Some of the findings, based primarily on 119 radio and 121 television journalists, showed much more similarity between television journalists and daily newspaper journalists than between television and radio journalists, an increase in the proportion of women working in broadcasting since 1971, and little change in the proportion of Blacks and Hispanics employed in radio and television news during the same period of time. Because there exist more similarities than differences between television and daily newspaper journalists, scholars and practitioners of journalism must use great care in categorizing journalists as either print or broadcast. (DF)

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Radio-TV Division

A Profile of U.S. Radio and Television Journalists

by

David Weaver, Dan Drew and G. Cleveland Wilhoit

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Presented to the Radio-Television Journalism Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication at the 1985 annual convention in Memphis, Tennessee. Drew is associate professor of journalism at Indiana University, where Weaver and Wilhoit are professors. The authors appreciate the support of The Gannett Foundation for the larger study from which these findings are drawn.

ABSTRACT

A Profile of U.S. Radio and Television Journalists

by David Weaver, Dan Drew, and G. Cleveland Wilhoit

This national survey shows that television journalists are much more similar to daily newspaper journalists in education, professional reading, and political party identification than they are to radio journalists. The survey also documents a striking increase in the proportion of women working in broadcasting since 1971 but shows little change in the proportion of Blacks and Hispanics employed in radio and television news.

A Profile of U.S. Radio and Television Journalists

Much of the literature about broadcast journalists has focused on the anchors and reporters who appear on camera daily. Ron Powers in The Newscasters[1] and Barbara Matusow in The Evening Stars[2] both chart the comings and goings of these highly visible journalists. In addition a series of national surveys by Vernon Stone has documented the background characteristics of news directors and their attitudes toward a number of job related issues.[3] But what little we have learned about the behind-the-scenes editorial personnel is embedded in case studies of specific broadcast news organizations.[4] The survey outlined here takes a look at the rank and file in radio and television news organizations and explores working patterns and attitudes about their jobs.

Methodology

This study is part of a larger survey designed to be a partial replication of the 1971 national survey of 1,328 U.S. journalists by sociologist John Johnstone and his colleagues.[5] In this study and in the larger survey, we followed closely the definition of a journalist used by Johnstone et al., as well as their sampling plan, to be able to compare our results with theirs. We also used many of the same questions as Johnstone, as well as some questions from a study of 489 journalists in eight U.S. daily newspapers by Judee and Michael Burgoon, and Charles Atkin.[6]

Population. As in the Johnstone study, the population of our study is "the full-time editorial manpower responsible for the information content

of English-language mass communications in the United States."[7] In other words, we are concerned here only with journalists who work for public communications media targeted at general audiences rather than special interest groups. These media include daily and weekly newspapers, news magazines, radio and television stations, and news agencies (such as The Associated Press) circulating in the United States. For findings concerning other kinds of journalists, see Weaver and Wilhoit, The American Journalist.[8] Our survey includes only full-time editorial personnel.

Definition of Journalist. Following Johnstone, we defined journalists as those who have editorial responsibility for the preparation or transmission of news stories or other information -- all full-time reporters, writers, correspondents, columnists, newsmen and editors. In broadcast organizations, only editorial staff in news and public affairs were included, not camera operators or audio technicians.

Sampling. We used a three-stage sampling plan similar to that used by Johnstone and his colleagues in 1971 to draw our national sample of journalists:

1) The first step was to compile lists of daily and weekly newspapers, news magazines, news services, and radio and television stations in the United States. We used the 1982 Editor & Publisher International Year Book for our lists of daily and weekly newspapers and news services, the 1982 Broadcasting-Cablecasting Yearbook for our lists of radio and television stations, and the 1982 Ayer Directory of Publications for our lists of news magazines.

From these sources, we used systematic random sampling to compile a list of 151 daily newspapers (stratified by size of circulation), 153

weekly newspapers, 24 news magazines, 63 news service bureaus, 91 radio stations (every 100th one) and 104 television stations (every 10th one).

2) The second task was to obtain lists of all journalists working fulltime for the 586 organizations in our sample. This was done by letter and telephone calls to all editors or news directors of these organizations. The letter defined what we meant by editorial personnel, and the lists of employees were audited by job title. We obtained numbers of personnel from 523 of the 586 organizations in our sample, a response rate of 89.2 percent. The best response was from radio stations (95.6%) and the worst from news services (74.6%).

3) The third task was to draw a representative national sample of individual journalists from the lists of names we collected in step 2. We used the total number of journalists working for the organizations that responded to estimate the total number of journalists working for news media throughout the U.S.[9] Then we calculated the percentages of all journalists working for the various media and used these percentages to determine how many journalists to include in our sample from the various media. The total sample numbered 1,250 journalists, comparable to Johnstone's sample of about 1,300. We slightly undersampled broadcast journalists (27.7% of our sample, as compared to 31.1% called for) and weekly newspaper journalists to allow for oversampling of news magazine and news service journalists who are much fewer in number than the other kinds of journalists. Because this present article is based mainly on the broadcast journalists, this undersampling has no effect on this study.

Interviewing. From this systematic random sample of 1,251 U.S. journalists, telephone interviews were completed with 1,001 for an overall response rate of 80.0 percent for individual journalists. We requested

three callbacks for each journalist, but up to 12 were made for some. Before these interviews were conducted by Market Interviews (a subsidiary of Market Opinion Rerearch in Detroit, Michigan) in December of 1982 and January and February of 1983, we sent a letter to each of the 1,251 journalists in our sample in November 1982 telling them about the study and how they were selected into the sample. We estimated the length of the interview to be one-half hour (actual interviews ranged from 20 to 40 minutes), and we urged them to participate.

We provided names and telephone numbers for the interviewers, and we permitted substitutions only if the interview was conducted with another person holding the same job title as the original respondent. Substitutions were not permitted until all names for that organization had been called. Near the end of the interviewing, we provided about 50 additional randomly selected names of journalists from our original lists to enable the interviewers to obtain at least 1,000 completed questionnaires. We are confident, however, that at least 90 percent of the 1,001 journalists interviewed came from our original systematic random sample.

This article is based primarily on the 119 radio and 121 television journalists interviewed from the total of 1,001.

Demographics

When the results of this survey are compared with those collected by Johnstone et al. in 1971, it is evident that there have been some major changes in the background characteristics of journalists, especially those in the broadcast media.[10] The most striking statistic is the dramatic

increase in the percentage of women working in broadcast news. Table 1 shows that more than a quarter of radio journalists are women. In 1971 that figure was 5 percent. Also the number of women working in television news has nearly tripled since the Johnstone survey. The number of women currently working in television, 43 percent, matches 1980 census figures for the percentage of women in the fulltime U.S. labor force.[11]

Table 1 About Here

The other major change in the journalistic workforce since the Johnstone study is the age distribution. The current survey shows that those working in the broadcast media are even younger than their print counterparts.[12] The average age of radio and television journalists is 31, compared to the daily newspaper average of 37. Although these averages are about the same as Johnstone et al. found in 1971, it is clear from the age distributions that 12 percent more journalists are in the 25-to-34 bracket than in 1971.[13]

Although women have made gains in the journalistic workforce since 1971, minorities have not. Only 2.9 percent of the journalists in this study are Black, compared to 3.9 percent in the Johnstone study. Hispanics also have lost ground with six-tenths of one percent in this study and 1.1 percent in the earlier survey.[14] These figures are put into context by 1980 census data that list 11.8 percent of the United States population as Black and 6.5 percent as Hispanic.[15] When the statistics in the current study are broken down by medium, television shows a larger percentage of Blacks than radio, while the number of Hispanics working in

each is about the same. (See Table 2.) Television employs nearly 6 percent more Blacks than do daily newspapers.

Table 2 About Here

One of the other background characteristics measured in this survey is political party identification. As a group, journalists are slightly less likely to call themselves Republicans than they were in 1971 (19 percent now compared to 26 percent then) and are slightly more likely to label themselves independent (39 percent now compared to 33 percent in 1971). The number who say they are Democrats is about the same over that 11-year period (39 percent now compared to 36 percent then).

Current figures by medium (Table 3) show that radio has a more even political balance between parties than television. Daily newspaper journalists are more similar to television than to radio journalists. Journalists are more likely than the general public to call themselves. Independents and are less likely to label themselves either Democrat or Republican. The exception is radio people, who were more likely to call themselves Republican than either the journalists in other media or members of the general public.

Table 3 About Here

Working Patterns

As would be expected, there is a great deal of difference in staff size when radio and television are compared. The median number of people on the radio news staff is 3.2, contrasted with a figure of 20 for television. Staff size is used as a control on a number of variables in this study (the median is the dividing point), and any differences found are reported in this paper.

Because they have fewer people on staff, broadcast journalists are less likely to have responsibility for following a beat than those working for daily newspapers. Thirty-one percent of the television reporters, 35 percent of the radio reporters, and 60 percent of the daily newspaper reporters say they cover a beat. Table 4 indicates the most common beats for broadcasters and points out a difference between radio and television. The radio journalists are more likely to attend to traditional geographical beats such as city hall and the police department while the most common beats for television are subject-oriented such as sports, consumer, medicine, and government. It is also interesting that county government receives little attention from either medium, and state coverage fares little better. Radio is much more likely to keep in touch with the police department for spot news.

Table 4 About Here

Regardless of the beat system, journalists seem to feel that they have quite a lot of freedom to determine story coverage. When asked how often

they are able to get a subject covered if they come up with a good idea for a story, 56 percent of the television people say "almost always" while 35 percent say "more often than not" and only 7 percent say "occasionally." No significant differences appear when television, radio, and daily newspapers are compared on this questions.

There are some differences by medium, however, when journalists are asked how much freedom they usually have in selecting the stories on which they work. Seventy-one percent of those in radio news say they have "almost complete freedom." Some 60 percent of the daily newspaper people and 48 percent of the television journalists chose that response. Apparently, because of the smaller staff size in radio, there is less supervision than in newspapers or television. Also, the logistical problems of shuffling television crews around a city probably keep much of the responsibility for story selection in the hands of assignment editors.

The same pattern appears when journalists are asked how much freedom they have in deciding "which aspects of a story should be emphasized." Seventy-three percent of the radio, 67 percent of the daily newspaper, and 54 percent of the television journalists say "almost complete freedom."

The broadcast media are quite different from print when it comes to editing the stories. Nearly 56 percent of the radio people and 42 percent of the television journalists report that their stories receive "no editing at all" from others in their organization. Only 18 percent of the daily newspaper employees fall into that category, while 68 percent of the print people say there is "some editing" and 14 percent say there is "a great deal."

Despite these differences, journalists in all three media receive about the same amount of feedback on their work. (See Table 5.) It's

interesting that the respondents say they hear more from the audience than from others in their organizations. They also get comments frequently from sources.

Table 5 About Here

Those who have supervisory responsibilities in the broadcast media (about 50 percent of the broadcast sample) say they are in close contact with reporters. Nearly 49 percent of the television supervisors say they have daily contact with reporters to discuss story ideas, and another 21 percent say they are in contact with reporters several times a day. The responses of television supervisors indicate they have more authority to edit the work of others than radio supervisors and exercise that authority more. On the other hand, 47 percent of the radio supervisors say they have a "great deal of" influence in decisions on hiring and firing editorial employees, compared to 18 percent of the television supervisors.

When they do edit stories, the broadcast supervisors turn up a list of complaints familiar to most journalism professors. (See Table 6.). Problems of grammar and syntax head the list, followed by spelling (in radio), awkward writing and repetition. The complaints are similar in print. Table 6 shows that the most commonly cited problems in broadcasting deal with writing rather than reporting or production.

Table 6 About Here

Attitudes Toward the Job

The majority of the respondents to this survey say they are satisfied with their jobs, and there are no significant differences by either type of medium or size of organization. (See Table 7.) A series of questions also probed further to determine the importance journalists attach to factors in judging the attractiveness of jobs. Table 8 shows the responses for television, which are similar to those in radio and daily newspapers for the first six items listed.

Tables 7 and 8 About Here

The figures indicate that money is not the major yardstick for journalists. They are much more likely to stress the opportunity to help people. Differences by medium do show up for the last three items, however. Nearly 70 percent of the radio people say job security is very important compared to 57 percent of the daily newspaper journalists and 48 percent of the television respondents. Also, those in radio are more likely than television people to say a chance to get ahead is very important while the daily newspaper personnel are less likely to say this.

Finally, more broadcast journalists than print say the opportunity to develop a specialty is very important. This difference probably reflects the fact that newspaper reporters are more likely to cover a beat, which forces one to develop a specialty.

Still another measure of job satisfaction is the future plans of those currently working in the field. Nearly 84 percent of the television journalists say they plan to be working as journalists five years from

now, and only 12 percent hope to be elsewhere. The figures do not differ significantly for radio or daily newspapers.

Although most respondents want to continue to work as journalists, some would like to move to a different medium. Seventeen percent of those in radio would like to cross over to television, while only two percent of those in television would rather be in radio. There is little desire on the part of broadcast journalists to work in print, and vice versa.

If there is any one factor that could persuade the journalists to leave their chosen field, however, it is pay. Some 39 percent of the television people say they might be tempted to leave journalism for a higher paying job. Other factors that might tempt them to leave are a new challenge (8%), lack of freedom (7%), burnout (6%), and better job security (6%). Responses for radio and daily newspaper employees are not significantly different.

Those who actually plan to leave journalism in five years list a number of fields as their alternative choices, including teaching, public relations, performing, production, self-employment, and retirement. Public relations is the most popular option. It is cited by 22 percent of the journalists who desire a change.

Perceptions of Audience and Role

One indication of a journalist's view of his or her function in society is the perception of audience interests. Respondents to this survey were given a series of three statements about the audience and asked to agree or disagree using a five-point scale.

Nearly 41 percent of the television journalists agree with the first statement, "Audience members are more interested in the day's breaking news than in analysis of long-term trends" (See Table 9), and responses of the radio people do not differ significantly. Daily newspaper people are less likely (36%) to agree strongly with the statement.

Table 9 About Here

There are no significant differences by medium when survey participants responded to the statement, "The majority of audience members have little interest in reading about social problems such as racial discrimination and poverty." Two-thirds of the journalists either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Disagreement with the statement that the audience is gullible and easily fooled is even higher (nearly 80%).

Another series of questions in this survey asked about the importance of various roles that have been associated with the news media. Analysis of the responses shows the existence of three role types: interpreters, disseminators, and adversaries. The interpreters say it is very important to investigate claims, analyze complex problems, and discuss national policy. Disseminators, on the other hand, say it is important to get information out quickly and to concentrate on the widest possible audience. Adversaries say it is important to be skeptical of public officials and business.

There is a great deal of overlap in acceptance of the roles, but differences by medium do show up. The newspaper people are more likely to endorse the interpretive role while radio respondents prefer the

disseminator role. Television journalists fall between. Endorsers of the adversary role are found more in print than in radio or television.

Professionalism

The survey asked a number of questions about variables that traditionally have been seen as indicators of professionalism in a field.[16] One of these factors is an individual's motivation for choosing a career. Table 10 shows that a wide range of influences affected decisions to go into electronic journalism. Encouragement from grade and high school teachers is listed most frequently for both radio and television. Radio people were most attracted by a "long-standing desire" to enter the field. "Always liked to write" is at the head of the list for newspaper journalists (15%), followed by encouragement from grade and high school teachers (9%).

Table 10 About Here

In terms of educational background, there is a great deal of difference between radio and television, with more college degrees in television. (See Table 11.) There is no difference in the percent of college degrees in large or small television organizations, but the radio people who work for larger organizations hold a higher percentage of college degrees than those who work for smaller radio stations. Slightly more TV journalists are college graduates (80%) than are daily newspaper journalists (74%).

Table 11 About Here

The college graduates come from a long list of majors that ranges from journalism to chemistry. Table 12 shows those most frequently mentioned. The newspaper people hold the most journalism degrees (51% do) followed by television and then radio. Radio-television degrees are most commonly held by those in radio.

Table 12 About Here

As might be expected from the discussion of age at the beginning of this paper, the typical newspaper journalist has more journalistic experience (13 years) than the typical radio reporter (9 years) or the typical television journalist (8 years).

In terms of keeping up with professional reading, the newspaper and television respondents are ahead of the radio journalists. Newspaper and television personnel read more newspapers, general magazines, and professional journals such as Columbia Journalism Review, Quill, and Washington Journalism Review than the radio people. There is no difference by medium, however, in the number of professional organizations journalists have joined. The average for all three groups is sixth-tenths of one percent.

Conclusions

This profile of U.S. television and radio journalists shows a striking increase in the proportion of women working in both media from 1971, especially in television, but little gain in the percentages of Blacks and Hispanics. Television does lead both radio and daily newspapers in relative numbers of Blacks employed in 1982-83, however.

Radio journalists are more likely than those in television to identify themselves as Republicans, to work for much smaller news organizations, to cover traditional geographic beats such as city hall and the police department, to claim they have more freedom in selecting stories and deciding which aspects of them should be emphasized, and to cite job security and a chance to get ahead as very important in the attractiveness of a job. Radio journalists are also much more likely to want to work for television than vice versa, and they are also more likely than TV journalists to endorse a neutral disseminator role rather than an interpretive one. Considerably more television journalists are college graduates (80 percent) than are radio journalists (53 percent). In addition, TV journalists are more likely to read more newspapers, magazines, and professional journals than are those who work for radio.

In short, television journalists are strikingly more similar to daily newspaper journalists in education, professional reading, and political party identification than they are to radio journalists, suggesting that the traditional "print-broadcast" distinction frequently made between journalists is often not valid.[17] The differences between radio and television journalists in the United States are many and substantial, as we have shown above. Because of these differences, scholars and

practitioners of journalism should use care in categorizing journalists as either print or broadcast.

Footnotes

[1]Ron Powers, The Newscasters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977).

[2]Barbara Matusow, The Evening Stars (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983).

[3]Vernon A. Stone, "Then and Now" RTNDA Communicator, October 1983, pp. 28-30.

[4]Edward Jay Epstein, News From Nowhere (New York: Random House, 1973). See also David L. Altheide, Creating Reality: How TV News Distorts Events (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1974).

[5]John Johnstone, Edward Slawski, and William Bowman, The News People (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), pp. 4-11.

[6]Judee K. Burgoon, Michael Burgoon and Charles K. Atkin, "The World of the Working Journalists" (New York: Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1982).

[7]Johnstone et al., op. cit., p. 5.

[8]David Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, The American Journalist (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming.)

[9]For more details on how we estimated the number of journalists working for U.S. news media, see Weaver and Wilhoit, op. cit., Appendix I.

[10]Johnstone et al., op. cit.

[11]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1982-1983, 103rd edition, p. 379.

[12]All differences between radio, television and newspapers reported in the paper have "p" values of .05 or less (Chi Square tests).

[13]Johnstone, et al., op. cit., p. 220.

[14]Johnstone, et al., op. cit., pp. 26 and 198.

[15]U.S. Bureau of the Census, op. cit., pp. 32, 33, 54, 55.

[16]Michael W. Singletary, "Commentary: Are Journalists 'Professionals'?," Newspaper Research Journal, 3:75 (1982).

[17]Lee B. Becker, "Print or Broadcast: How the Medium Influences the Reporter," in James S. Ettema and D. Charles Whitney (eds.), Individuals in Mass Media Organizations: Creativity and Constraints (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982).

TABLE 1

Sex Distribution of Journalists
(Percentages)

	Female	Male
Television (N = 121)	43	66
Radio (N = 118)	26	73

Rows do not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

TABLE 2

Racial Distribution of Journalists by Medium
(Percentages)

	Television (N = 119)	Radio (N = 117)
White	90	96
Black	8	3
Hispanic	1	1

Column totals may not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

TABLE 3

Political Distribution of Journalists by Medium
(Percentages)

	Television (N=116)	Radio (N=116)	General Public[a]
Democrat	36	30	45
Republican	22	30	25
Independent	41	38	30
Other	1	2	-

Column totals may not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

[a]From George H. Gallup, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1983. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1984, p. 82.

TABLE 4

Most Frequent Beats Covered
by Radio and Television Stations
(Percentages)

Television		Radio	
Sports	14	City Hall	16
Consumer	11	Police	16
Medicine	11	Government	14
Government	11	Sports	8
Police	4	Education	5
City Hall	4	County Gov.	3
Courts	4	State Gov.	3
County Gov.	4	Courts	0
State Gov.	0	Human Interest	3

Columns do not add up to 100 percent because all responses are not included.

TABLE 5

Sources of Regular Feedback for
Broadcast Journalists
(Percentages)

	Television (N=119)	Radio (N=121)
People above in the organization	46	45
People at the same level	41	45
People in other organizations	17	9
News Sources	35	37
Audience members	57	53

Totals do not add up to 100 percent because all categories of response are not listed.

TABLE 6

The Most Commonly Mentioned
Faults in Broadcast Writing
(Percentages)

	Television (N=59)	Radio (N=59)
Grammar, syntax	17	26
Awkward writing	9	8
Repitition	8	7
Hasty writing	6	2
Poor broadcast style	6	5
Unclear writing	5	5
Poor production	4	1
Camera work	4	0
Spelling	2	11
Poor organization	2	5

Columns do not add up to 100 percent because all responses are not listed.

TABLE 7

Job Satisfaction
(Percentages)

	Television	Radio
Very Satisfied	36	42
Fairly Satisfied	47	40
Somewhat Dissatisfied	16	16
Very Dissatisfied	2	2

Columns may not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

TABLE 8

Important Factors Television Journalists Use in Judging Jobs
(Percentages)

	Not Very Important	Fairly Important	Very Important
Pay	11	63	26
Benefits	25	48	27
Freedom from Supervision	25	45	31
Helping People	6	26	68
Editorial Policies	23	22	55
Autonomy	7	41	53
Job Security	12	40	48
Chance to Get Ahead	11	35	54
Chance to Develop a Specialty	11	32	58

Rows may not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

TABLE 9

Television Journalists' Reactions to
Statements About the Audience
(Percentages)

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Audience most interested in breaking news	2	9	4	44	41
Audience not interested in social problems	27	40	3	22	8
Audience is gullible	56	22	3	10	9

Rows may not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

TABLE 10

Some Motivations for Becoming a Journalist
(Percentages)

	Television (N=115)	Radio (N=118)
Advised by grade or high school teacher	8	6
Always liked sports	7	1
Always wanted to be a journalist	5	10
Interest in current events	5	6
Took a class in college	5	5
By chance	6	6
Had skill or background	4	4
Journalist as role model	4	3
College teacher advised	4	3
Worked on school paper	4	6
A job opened up	4	3

Columns may not add up to 100 percent because all responses are not included.

TABLE 11

Education Levels of Journalists
(Percentages)

	Television	Radio
Some High School	0	3
Completed High School	0	13
One to Three Years College	20	32
College Graduate	62	40
Some Graduate School	11	5
Advanced Degree	7	8

Columns may not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

TABLE 12

The Most Frequently Mentioned Undergraduate Majors of Journalists
(Percentages)

	Television (N=97)	Radio (N=64)
Radio-Television	22	27
Other Mass Media Degree	22	14
Journalism	20	13
Political Science - Government	8	14
Speech	5	0
English	4	14

Totals do not add up to 100 percent because all responses are not included in the table.